

'The Time-travelling-gathering Slide-show'

Andrew Paterson

Introduction

This text explores the case of an artist-researcher (myself) and the 'time-travelling-gathering slide-show'. It aims to highlight the complicity of the artist in relation to the visual data or materials s/he generates in a research process.

I write in reflection of participation within a doctoral presentation seminar titled 'studying visual data generated by artistic work' in November 2005¹. As part of the seminar process, I presented the following visual materials for the seminar topic: a digital slide-show file², which was generated for the outgoing presentation of an artist residency at RIXC Centre for New Media, Riga -Latvia, in June 2004.

This is the 'time-travelling-gathering slide-show' referred to in the title; a slide-show used more than once in different locations. In the process of representation it accumulates not only spatio-temporal presentations of the artistic-researcher Self, but also raised awareness of other practices that reframe the understanding of the visual data or materials: the flaneur, reflective-practitioner, the illusionist-magician, the storyteller, and the relation of the audience in reenactment.

In the process of writing, to maintain clarity between the two occasions upon which this slide-show was presented, it has been necessary to label them. Hence, the original artist-residency presentation will be referred to as event 'A', while the doctoral seminar presentation using the same slide-show, will be referred to as event 'B'.

Event 'A' (6th June 2004, Riga -Latvia)

I am sitting at a table in RIXC Centre for New Media Culture. There is an audience of about 10 people, mostly connected to RIXC Centre. They are sitting waiting for me to begin to tell about my activities being an artist-in-residence. It is the evening before I leave, and I am wearing my Scottish kilt. I have not prepared anything except my digital image slides, which I am counting on to help me tell about my experiences.

Reflecting, I write:

On my laptop, I was pressing the right-arrow key to click through the slide-show according to the pace of my stories, my experiences. I was also sitting in front of a microphone. It had been put there to record, to archive my spoken words. The file was later put onto a server to be 'streamed'. To be listened to online, on another occasion.

As an academic-flaneur..

Alan Brainer in an urban studies lecture at University of Helsinki, introduced the academic-flaneur's view: *Where what I see is all there is. There is no other evidence*³.

The methodology proposed by the academic-flaneur is one of observing, but also taking part in creating experiences of the urban space. This methodology has a history of privilege. Charles Baudelaire, expressed in his writings from 19th Century Paris, that "for the perfect flaneur, for the passionate spectator, it is an immense job to set up house in the middle of the multitude, amid the ebb and flow of movement, in the midst of the fugitive and the infinite"⁴. When Walter Benjamin followed his interests in a similar manner in early 20th Century Berlin, it was an age of security for children of upper middle class families who were assured of an income without having to work. Chris Jenks, in a book called 'Watching your Step: The History and Practice of the Flaneur.' wrote of "a creative attitude of urban inquisition"⁵. The critical question would be that that attitude all depends upon how much time there is to be inquisitive.

Alan Brainer elaborated other factors in which being a 'good flaneur', is most likely to involve: It being a solitary activity for someone who doesn't have that many or overly close attachments (companionship can be distracting to catch the nuances of a place); It being a position of aloofness, drifting along above the normal concerns; It being something in which you need free-time to engage, without the concern to have to go home by a certain time; Being able to 'just go with the mood or flow'; It being due to these factors, a historically masculine endeavor. Finally it was mentioned an activity which presumes a certain sensitivity: Not just observing other people's clothes, jewellery, behaviour, or body language, but also smells, sounds snippets of overheard conversation, fleeting glimpses.

His lecture had no pictures, no slide-show, but still it drifted between different places and recounted various experiences in contact with others. As an investigative process, instinct, attraction and personal interest generates experiences for the teller and the listener; experiences for the observer and the viewer; experiences for the writer and the reader.

Event 'B' (19th November 2005, Helsinki)

I am sitting at a table in Media Lab, University of Art and Design, Helsinki. There are 3 others in the room also. They sitting waiting for the my seminar presentation, which is the 2nd in a series of 3 that afternoon. We are also together to share discussion regarding our visual materials generated by artistic work. I have prepared notes on paper which I arrange in front of me.

Reflecting, I write:

To begin my presentation, I pressed play on the 'Real Audio Player' software on my laptop. This was the archived file of my spoken words of event 'A', selectively positioned to begin: Start at 45:48. Listen until 52:20. I sat silently, while my recorded voice spoke. I was also pressing the right-arrow key to quickly click through the slide-show. I justified this by saying, "You will only get fleeting glimpses". Indeed the lecture by Bairner was only the day previous and influenced the manner and content. I was interested not only on the im/material drift through time and space, but also the accumulation and gathering in the process. Reflecting upon the artist-residency presentation (event 'A') in Latvia, I realised I had not only been telling stories, but unconsciously exposing many aspects of the flaneur's view: I was, frankly, a 'good flaneur': And so I was doing it again, clicking through different times and places in Latvia I had been and experienced, reenacting the slide-show of event 'A'; drifting through the people I met, and places I had visited and experienced in Riga, Karosta-Liepaja, Helsinki, Riga, Karosta-Liepaja, Daugavpils, Riga.

However, with the last slide in view, between one-and-a-half years, between Riga and Helsinki, my archived voice from event 'A' said, on the occasion of event 'B':

I now come to this last slide.. Because actually for me this last week has been.. Of course doing the workshop in Daugavpils.. Which meant now I have been working in 3 different locations in Latvia, spread around a network not only with different organisations, but talking to different people, different ages, different generations.. Eh.. Communicating to people online.. In other countries managing this sort of being here in residence in Latvia.. With being here in residence on the computer.. With being here in residence on the Internet. Eh and then trying to imagine, actually so.. Ha ha.. In some way you have to this mix of different things.. I cant imagine.. eh spending 2 months in a place, which is not where you live, which is ehh of course culturally different from where you come from., which offers opportunities to have a dialogue with people from different places. And spend all time online. I am happy I have somehow managed to mix this up.. And I hope that the talk that I have made here is, at least, visually maybe orally has shared where some of these things have overlapped. Thank you.⁶

The 'Last Slide'

The 'last slide' (figure 1) offers the viewer a perspective at a table – the perspective of this author as an artist-researcher, in front of a laptop during the presentation event 'A'. This view is also written as present tense in italics, with a partially described accompanying context. The spectator is invited also, to imagine oneself sitting at the table, in front of a laptop during a presentation.

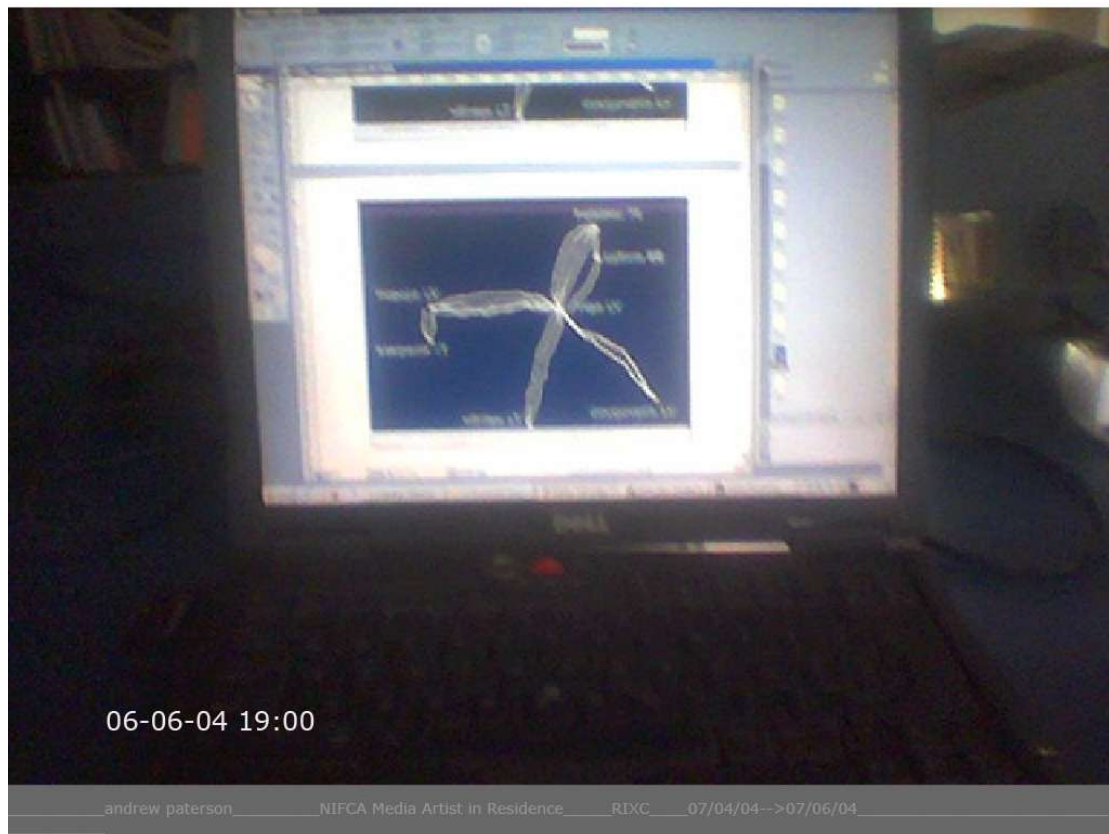


Figure 1. The 'last slide'

As an artist-researcher

The visual artist Douglas Gordon, reflecting upon his own practice, and speaking of the influence of his environmental art education, said that "an artist had to be able to understand the context in which the work was to be seen", stating the maxim developed by the Artist Placement Group (APG) founded by John Latham and Barbara Stavini among others: 'context is half of the work'⁷.

Accordingly, the artist-researcher often says and write many things - selecting, framing, focusing attention, describing, elaborating. Writing critically about scientific knowledge production, Donna Haraway states that objectivity, and the relationship to researcher's material can only be made when the particular and specific is made explicit; that there is "an argument for situated and embodied knowledges and against various forms of unlocatable, and so irresponsible, knowledge claims. Irresponsible means unable to be called into account"⁸.

The artist-researcher, if aiming to understand 'the context in which the work is seen', should be engaging also the situated and embodied knowledge that is produced in the research process. This activity is also accountable to irresponsible claims, but under different conditions to which Haraway refers. Involved not in generating solutions confirmed with the observer's data, but as Stephen Scrivener suggests, in creative production, artistic research generates audio-visual materials. These materials contribute to the field of their production (and ideally society-at-large) by generating "original apprehensions"⁹.

Donald Schön, writing in his classic text 'The Reflective Practitioner', suggests that problems are not presented to the practitioner as given, but are "constructed from the materials of problematic situations which are puzzling, troubling, and uncertain"¹⁰. In-other-words combining these perspectives, there are no agreements which are fixed and clear, instead, the emphasis is not on problem solving, but situated problem *setting*.

Reflecting upon my presentation as an artist-researcher, the 'last slide' (Figure 1) is "the view from a body, always a complex, contradictory, structuring and structured body.. [that involves] the sciences and politics of interpretation, translation, stuttering, and the partially understood."¹¹; that this is not data, but material that creates situated creative productions.

Both events 'A' and 'B', involved intervening processes undertaken by the artist-researcher: selecting, framing, focusing attention, describing, elaborating, both in performance and through reflective and autobiographical writing.

These processes 'return to' and 're-enacts' activities (presentations) undertaken, situations lived through, in the mood of speculation and in deliberate effort to consider future cases. It aims to make sense of the apprehension, reflecting upon, as Schön suggests, the understandings which have been implicit in the action: "Through reflection, [the reflective practitioner] can surface and criticise the tacit understandings that have grown up around the repetitive experiences of a specialised practice, and can make new sense of the situations of uncertainty or uniqueness which he may allow himself to experience"¹². Schön, elaborating the process of reflection-in-action, notes that "in order to see what can be made to follow from his reframing of the situation, each practitioner tries to adapt the situation to frame"¹³.

In this case, the visual images from Latvia were not gathered like data to be analysed 'as-they-are', but captured, framed, arranged, packaged as a slide-show presented once, and presented again as part of an artist-researchers' practice. It is more appropriate to say that the visual images are *materials*, arranged to create an *artefact* (in this case, the slideshow) that may be utilised and, if reframed coherently, performed as a presentation over and over. The visual materials become a "repertoire of examples, images, understandings, and actions" among other things, which can be cross-referenced to perceive an unique situation as both similar and different to a familiar one¹⁴.

From the artist-researcher's position: the slide-show presentation of event 'B' was a way to creatively drift through time and space, combining inquiry and intervention; A way which was 'transactional', shaping the situation of event 'B', but in conversation with it, so that ones own models and appreciations are also

shaped by the situation of event 'A'¹⁵.

As an illusionist-magician..

In recent trip to Latvia in December 2005, I met a French illusionist magician¹⁶. We conversed about his practice, or more accurately my partial understanding of it. To recall, his magic seemed to be based on coincidence: the overlapping presence of visible/material and invisible/immaterial presence in one space and time. The performative act was a silent show, in which he didn't say a word. Instead, it was a skillful, agile and trained manipulation of coincidences into a narrative sequence arranged in synchronicity with his music that created the wonder in the audience.

The audience, on their part, agrees to be part of a situation where they are willing to be entertained by something they know to be a trick in advance. With this unspoken agreement between the performer and the audience, the performing artist, presenting the visual trick, generates the magic affect and the appreciative sparkles in the audiences' eye¹⁷. The unspoken agreement is important, to maintain a distance from the practitioner's knowledge, i.e. the illusionist-magicians skill in performing visual tricks. So that it is not locatable and identifiable.

The illusionist-magician's practice opens up the consideration of reframing event 'B' as a sequenced narrative of 'arranged coincidences'. To elaborate:

The Scottish kilt worn round my waist sitting at the table in Riga of event 'A', in front of a microphone capturing my voice, was an arranged coincident with the representation of the kilt that I wore in a digital slide-show of a performative action in June 2004. In comparison, these scenes were quickly flashed by – fleeting glimpses – to the presentation audience of event 'B'. Meanwhile, the archived voice of my presentation of event 'A' was arranged to coincide with the performative aspect of event 'B'; were I sat for 5 minutes in front of the listeners in the room, not saying anything, while the voice 'coincidentally' refers to the last slide (figure 1) which I left static for the majority of time, allowing the observer's eye to wander.

The unspoken agreement between the audience and the artist-researcher, when presented with visual materials, is that the audience agrees to be part of a situation where they are willing to be informed by visual materials they know to be highly subjective. Indeed, work that is likely to be personally and emotionally-involved and closely related to the individual who has had acute control over its production and presentation.

As a storyteller..

I now reframe event 'A', as an occasion when I was a storyteller, being an *individual narrator* with a sense of identity and control.¹⁸

On the occasion of event 'A', sitting in front of a microphone, I started telling my story of my time in Latvia. I was accounting for my everyday experiences over a

period of 2 months, in my own improvised words using a slide-show that I had arranged into a partial but linear narrative. I was very much in control of the presentation. What I decided to show and tell was, almost literally, my points of view of what interested me during that period.

According to Ruth Finnegan, introducing individual narratives and identity from a sociological and cultural studies perspective, there are potentially different ways of telling about oneself¹⁹. For example, expressing ideas of similarity or difference by referring to social categories, potentially combining the view of identity as a site of struggle where relations of power are produced or reproduced; Or highlighting the historically-contingent nature of my personal narrative.

These are interpretations that may be applied in reflective labour if so desired, but do not especially serve a function here. Instead, Haraway's notion of situated knowledge, where the 'particular and specific is made explicit', appears as the voice of the individual narrator. The visual materials emphasised a situational sense of identity, according to the context I found myself in, highlighting, in a series of particular moments in time, a multi-faceted and relative sense of identity. The self-centred view externalised to include other perspectives: some of the photographs were taken by others as documentation of events in which I was an active participant, accentuating the self as actively performed, expressed through performed activities and rituals, in which one takes part with other people.

This last point leads towards an acknowledgment that the individual is not situated independent of others when the story or narrative is generated. Reminiscent of Gordan's reference to context being half the work, personal stories are culturally constructed and actively 'enstoried' by their tellers: They are "not just creations of 'free' autonomous individuals, but also of the cultural conventions that he or she makes use of. The stories are themselves cultural forms as well as constructing the life and experiences of their tellers"²⁰.

In this case, a slide-show of images from different locations is a cultural form generated from travel, projects, with an idea of time, sequence and progression; the artist presentation at the end of a residency, speaks of 'what was done', and reflects, organised for the first time, the experiences of the artist-in-residence.

Personal stories are not only a way of formulating and conveying experience, but shaping the teller's experience; "not as a reflection of life but rather as a way of constructing it"²¹. From this point of view, Jerome Bruner, in his essay 'Life as Narrative' asks, "that they had better be viewed not as a record of what happened.. but rather as a continuing interpretation and reinterpretation of our experience?"²².

As a reenactment..

In this text I have presented *again* a selection from my repertoire of visual and audio materials, generated previously in event 'A', on the following occasion of event 'B'. In particular, I have focused upon a key-frame image introduced earlier as figure 1, showing the view as seen by myself, the artist sitting in front of a laptop presenting the slide-show. My bodily presence in the image is absent, but

it is my body that defines the perspective, and situates an other viewer within it.

Jennifer Allen in her 'Observations on Reenactment', states that "reenactment always presupposes a missing body", in which "a unique body has been replaced by an endless series of bodies that are inter-changable with one another, across time and space"²³. My original position, in front of the laptop on event 'A' viewing the 'last slide', was acted out for the second occasion of event 'B'. However, this view may be extended beyond the audience present on both occasions. This perspective is likely to have been occupied by other viewers, potentially innumerable. Anyone, anywhere can download the above spoken-word and look at these the accompanying slide-show images. It is likely that they will be experienced in different contexts, events and locations without my knowledge. I can also admit that I have used the slide-show in different artist-researcher contexts on further occasions²⁴.

Reenactments "attempt to deny the passage of time itself and seek to be at one with the past"²⁵, but at same time depends upon "a linear construction of time, in which the existence of the past event has expired and therefore can be safely enacted once again, without being confused with itself."²⁶. The 'time-hole' first suggested in the introduction, or later reframed as an 'arranged coincident'; the 'last slide' illustrated in figure 1 aligned with my archived spoken-word which collapsed the time-distance between event 'A' and 'B' was possible *because* it was a reenactment: "In contrast to the chaotic unfolding of the original event, the reenactment knows what will happen and more importantly, when this happening starts and finishes"²⁷.

The spectators, the audience, witnessing by being-there-in-presence are important in legitimising the record of what happened:

"In the eyes of the witness, the original event becomes historical by taking up time, and claims its status as history by appearing as a discrete event with a finite duration.. The witness casts a particular gaze.. recognising something that has already happened, even if the event was not experienced firsthand by the witness. In recognition – which is linked to the verbs identify, admit, endorse and honor – the gaze fulfils the promise of instant knowledge, while legitimizing this knowledge as recurring truth."

However, as the files are available and archived on the RIXC server (see appendix A), anyone anywhere, with an Internet connection can download the archived spoken-word of event 'A', and look at the the accompanying slide-show. So it is most likely that they will be experienced in different contexts, events and locations without my knowledge. When the witnesses are unlocatable, how does the gaze then legitimize the events represented as truths? It is hard for me to answer.

Conclusion

In the end, all I can do is to take account of my own experiences. The reframing of interconnected aspects of events 'A' and 'B' throughout this text has highlighted the complicity of my control in presenting the visual materials (slide show images)

and my inseparable nature to the content within them.

As an artist-researcher, I wrote about both events describing my own intervention in specific contexts, constructing and rearranging words. I was also physically present on each event, making a presentation of the same visual images – a slide-show – to a small audience. Further-more, I arranged the slide-show was for event 'A', to represent perceived moments which had happened to me over a period of time.

Although I acknowledge that I was wandering through different times and places like the flaneur, gathering embodied, material and immaterial traces of visual (and aural) materials, my own experience is what I share with the audience, more or less being familiar. The resulting slide-show was the tool to arrange also the coincidents of one's own emotions, movements, memories, and voices into a narrative sequence. However like the self 'enstoried', it is a privileged but troubled narrative due to its reflexivity – the artist-researcher and the artist in the narrative are the same:

“This [...] reflexivity of self-narrative poses problems of a deep and serious order – problems beyond verification, beyond issues of indeterminacy (that the very telling of the self-story distorts what we have in mind to tell), beyond 'rationalisation'. The whole whole enterprise is a shaky one [...] Yet for all the shakiness of the form, it is perfectly plain that not just any autobiography will do – either for its teller or for its listener, for that matter.”²⁸

It *is* important that the perspective in front of the laptop was originally my own. Communicating with situated (visual) knowledge, aims upon constructing coherence, not as a reflection of objective reality, but as a means to make and communicate a sense of the complicated overlaps in which one is situated. As the heart of Bruner's argument proclaims, “eventually the culturally shaped cognitive and linguistic processes that guide the self-telling of life narratives achieve the power to structure perceptual experience, to organise memory, to segment and purpose-build the very 'events' of a life. In the end, we become the autobiographical narratives by which we 'tell about' our lives.”²⁹.

To quote Bruner, “the life as led is inseparable from the life as told.. how it is interpreted and reinterpreted, told and retold”³⁰, performed with a time-travelling-gathering slide-show.

Appendix A

Text associated with RIXC NetRadio archive: <http://rixc.lv/radio/>

7 jūnijs 2004 | 7 june 2004

[LOKATĪVIE MEDIJI] nr. 001-2004: Situated experiences of a resident in networks klausīties(realmedia formāts):<http://ozone.re-lab.net/sessions/07jun04.ram>

RIXC NIFCA rezidenču mākslinieks Andrew Patersons pavadīja 2 mēnešus rezidencē starp Rīgu, Liepājas Karostu un Daugavpili plānojot tīkla projektus un wiki kopšanu vasarai, palīdzot kultūras izdevumu (plakāti, flajeri, NICEpaper) apmaiņā Baltijas galvaspilsētās, darbojoties kā skotu svārkos tērpts aģents Karostas "Euro-watching" sērijā un ierosinot un piedaloties K@2 Kultūras centra virtuves koptelpas atjaunošanas kopprojektā; vadot mobilo SMS darbnīcu "Kadrējums" Daugavpilī jaunu cilvēku grupai. Prezentācijas attēli atspoguļoja stāstus un notikumus, kā arī līdz šim neizteiktos jautājumus, kas Andrew Patersonam bija radušies rezidences laikā.

[LOCATIVE MEDIA] nr. 001-2004: Situated experiences of a resident in networks listen (realmedia file):<http://ozone.re-lab.net/sessions/07jun04.ram>

As NIFCA Media artist-in-residence at RIXC, Andrew Paterson spread the 2 month duration of April and May in residence between Riga, Karosta-Liepaja, and Daugavpils: Doing online production planning and wiki gardening for the summer; Helping with cultural paper exchange (posters, flyers, NICE papers) between Baltic capitals; Acting as kilted Scottish agent in Karosta's 'Euro-watching' project; Initiating and working on the collaborative renovation of social/kitchen space in K@2 Cultural Centre; Coordinating a mobile SMS 'kadreejums' workshop in Daugavpils with a group of young Russian-Latvian people. The presentation reflected in a slide show - stories and anecdotes - with the unspoken questions in mind that arose during his residency.

<<http://mlab.uiah.fi/~apaterso>>

<http://mlab.uiah.fi/~apaterso/apaterson_rixc_air_2004.pdf>"

- 1 Coordinated by media artist-researcher Heidi Tikka, as part of 3 day doctoral seminar entitled 'Visual Data research methods' at Media Lab and Visual Culture departments, University of Art and Design Helsinki in November 2005.
- 2 The .pdf file [4.8 MB] can be downloaded: http://mlab.uiah.fi/~apaterso/apaterson_rirc_2004.pdf
- 3 'Change and Continuity in Belfast: a flaneurs view' lecture by Alan Bairner, lecture at University of Helsinki, 17th November 2005.
- 4 Baudelaire, Charles, *Selected Writings on Art and Artist* (1972), quoted from: http://www.eng.fju.edu.tw/Literary_Criticism/postmodernism/postmo_urban/flaneur.html
- 5 Jenks, Chris, 'Watching your Step: The History and Practice of the Flaneur', *Visual Culture*, Ed. Chris Jenks, (Routledge, New York, 1995), page 156, quoted from: http://www.eng.fju.edu.tw/Literary_Criticism/postmodernism/postmo_urban/flaneur.html
- 6 Transcription of archived real audio file: <http://ozone.re-lab.net/sessions/07jun04.ram>, 50:25-52:00
- 7 Douglas Gordon in conversation with Jan Debbaut, 'Kidnapping' (Stedelijk Van Abbemuseum, Eindhoven, 1998).
- 8 Haraway, Donna, *Simians, Cyborgs and Women*, (Free Association Books, London, 1991), page 191.
- 9 Scrivener, Stephen, 'Chiasma: combining art and design research' Conference, University of Art and Design Helsinki, 12-13th September 2005.
- 10 Schön, Donald, 'The Reflective Practitioner: how professionals think in action' (Basic Books USA, 1993), page 40-41.
- 11 Haraway, Donna, *Simians, Cyborgs and Women*, (Free Association Books, London, 1991), page 195.
- 12 Schön, Donald, *Ibid.*, page 61.
- 13 Schön, Donald, *Ibid.*, page 131.
- 14 *Ibid.*, page 138.
- 15 *Ibid.*, page 150.
- 16 Xavier Mortimer, <http://www.theatreletemple.fr/lombreorchestre.htm>
- 17 For further general information about 'magic' and 'illusionist arts': <http://en.wikipedia.org/Magic>
- 18 Finnegan, Ruth, 'Storying The Self: personal narratives and identity', *Consumption and Everyday Life*, Ed. Hugh Mackay, Sage Publishing, 1997, page 85.
- 19 Ruth Finnegan, 'Storying The Self: personal narratives and identity', *Consumption and Everyday Life*, Ed. Hugh Mackay, Sage Publishing, 1997, page 68.
- 20 *Ibid.*, page 78.
- 21 *Ibid.*, page 75.
- 22 Bruner, Jerome, 'Life as Narrative', *Consumption and Everyday Life*, Ed. Hugh Mackay, Sage Publishing, 1997, page 105.
- 23 Allen, Jennifer, 'Observations on Reenactment', *Life Once More: forms of reenactment in contemporary art catalogue*, Ed. Sven Lütticken, published by Witte de With Centre for Contemporary Art, Rotterdam, 2005, p. 179.
- 24 On the following occasions between 2004-2005: In a workshop with Helsinki University students; In an Australian national mobile arts-industry symposium; In a research seminar at Helsinki Institute of Information Technology; In an artist presentation at Helsinki University.
- 25 Allen, Jennifer, *Ibid.*, page 183.
- 26 Allen, Jennifer, *Ibid.*, page 187.
- 27 Allen, Jennifer, *Ibid.*, page 185.
- 28 Bruner, Jerome, *Ibid.*, page 105-106.
- 29 *Ibid.*, page 106.
- 30 *Ibid.*, page 111.